

**AN ANALYSIS OF TECHNICAL WRITING  
NEEDS OF STUDENTS IN COLLEGES OF  
TECHNOLOGY IN OMAN**

**By**

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>TW</b>	Technical Writing
<b>C T</b>	College of Technology
<b>N A</b>	Needs Analysis
<b>DA</b>	Documents Analysis
<b>H C T</b>	Higher College of Technology
<b>MoM</b>	Ministry of Manpower
<b>TOFEL</b>	Test of English as a Foreign Language
<b>IELTS</b>	International English Language Testing System
<b>IT</b>	Information Technology
<b>GPA</b>	Grade Point Average
<b>LCD</b>	liquid Crystal Display
<b>PF</b>	Post Foundations
<b>SME</b>	Subject Matter Expert
<b>API</b>	Application Programming Interference
<b>UNIVAC</b>	Universal Automatic Computer
<b>MLA</b>	Modern Language Association
<b>ANSI</b>	American National Standards Institute
<b>SGML</b>	Standard Generalized Markup Language
<b>HTML</b>	Hyper Text Markup Language
<b>ISO</b>	International Organization for standardization
<b>XML</b>	Extensible Markup Language
<b>DVD</b>	Digital Versatile/Video Disc

<b>MSDS</b>	Manual Safety Data Sheets
<b>OSHA</b>	Occupational Safety and Health Administration
<b>SEC</b>	Securities and Exchange Commission
<b>CMS</b>	Content Management System
<b>ESP</b>	English for Specific Purposes
<b>CNP</b>	Communicative Needs Processor
<b>PSA</b>	Present Situation Analysis
<b>TSA</b>	Target Situation Analysis
<b>HOD</b>	Head of Department
<b>HOS</b>	Head of Section

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# **ANALISIS KEPERLUAN PENULISAN PARA PELAJAR DI KOLEJ TEKNOLOGI DI OMAN**

## **ABSTRAK**

Matlamat keseluruhan kajian ini adalah untuk menganalisis keperluan penulisan para pelajar Kolej Teknologi (CT) di Oman. Dalam persepsi yang lebih luas, kajian ini berusaha mengetahui sejauh manakah bahan kursus Penulisan Teknikal (TW) memenuhi ciri-ciri kursus TW dan keperluan penulisan pelajar. Selain itu, ia juga menilai keperluan penulisan pelajar CT di Oman dan mengkaji jurang di antara amalan semasa dan amalan terbaik. Lima kumpulan peserta yang terdiri daripada pelajar penulisan teknikal, guru, jabatan teknikal, pensyarah, dan graduan serta pekerja CT dihubungi bagi tujuan pengumpulan data. Keperluan penulisan pelajar dianalisis berdasarkan dapatan soal selidik, temu bual dan analisis genre. Data dianalisis secara kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Triangulasi sumber maklumat dan instrumen membantu dalam memperoleh gambaran yang lebih ketara tentang keperluan penulisan sebenar dalam kalangan pelajar. Kajian menunjukkan tahap ketidaksepadan di antara kandungan kursus TW, penyampaian dan penilaian dan keperluan penulisan sebenar pelajar dan teori TW. Hampir kesemua peserta bersetuju tentang kepentingan membuat perubahan dalam kursus TW bagi disesuaikan dengan keperluan penulisan pelajar. Dapatan kajian menyediakan cadangan atau saranan bagi menambah baik atau meningkatkan amalan pengajaran kursus TW (kandungan kursus TW, penyampaian dan penilaian dan ciri-ciri kursus TW) berdasarkan keperluan analisis (NA) yang dijalankan.

# **AN ANALYSIS OF TECHNICAL WRITING NEEDS OF STUDENTS IN COLLEGES OF TECHNOLOGY IN OMAN**

## **ABSTRACT**

The overall aim of this study is to analyze the writing needs of students in the Colleges of Technology (CTs) in Oman. Within this broad perception, the study endeavored finding out to what extent the Technical Writing (TW) course materials meet the TW course features and the students writing needs. It also assessed the students' writing needs in the CTs in Oman to investigate the gap between the current practice and the best practice. Five groups of participants were approached for the purpose of data collection; students, technical writing teachers, technical departments' lecturers, CTs graduates and employers. The students writing needs were analyzed by means of questionnaires, interviews and genre analysis. Data was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The triangulation of sources of information and instruments helped in obtaining a more tangible picture of the students' actual writing needs. The study revealed a level of mismatch between the TW course content, delivery and assessment and the students' actual writing needs and the TW theory. Almost all the participants agreed on the importance of making a change in the TW course to suit the students' writing needs. The findings of the study provided recommendations to improve teaching practice of the TW course in the CTs in Oman at the levels of the TW course content, delivery and assessment based on the conducted needs analysis (NA).

# CHAPTER ONE

## 1.0 Introduction

English has become the common language in many areas, particularly in science and technology leading to the growing requirement for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. These ESP courses cater to the needs of particular groups of people in various fields. Most colleges and universities that recognize this tendency try to provide their students with both knowledge of the subject matter and the skills to handle the foreign language.

Writing is an essential aspect for students in their technical departments and for employees in their workplace. Through writing they are able to communicate their technical knowledge to others. Writing skills are important in getting a job and are always taken into consideration when hiring employees. Writing skills are valued in private and government sectors, as shown by many studies done in this field (Barrass, 2006; Gould & Losano, 2000; Pringlle & O'keefe, 2009, & Reep, 2010). Reep (2010) referred to surveys done in the USA indicated that the writing responsibilities are a crucial part of most workdays. 120 American companies which employ more than 8 million people were surveyed to find out the importance of writing in the workplace. The surveys revealed that 70% of these companies have writing responsibilities in their job descriptions. Engineers spend 64% of their time in some form of communication with 32% dedicated to written communication. Students in their technical departments, scientists, engineers and others should have the Technical Writing (TW) abilities in order to be effective in their workplace. In

Oman TW is valued by stakeholders in the Colleges of Technology (CTs) and by decision makers in the government and private sector as an essential component of technical communication (MoM, 2004).

The CTs in Oman offer higher education in seven main areas: Engineering, Business Studies, Information Technology (IT), Applied Sciences, Fashion Design, Pharmacy and Photography. The first year is a general English course for all students. It aims at increasing their general proficiency in English language in order to prepare them for their specialization study. As for the Post Foundation English Courses such as TW teachers are only provided with very broad guidelines and are asked to produce their own teaching materials. The TW course' teachers are left to their own plan.

The initial need in response to such a task is to transfer the list of items from the contents' page in one of the course books which are available in the college library and plan the teaching according to it. Before applying this approach, teachers should ask themselves the following question: Does the use of specialized materials alone form TW teaching? Isn't there a need to identify the students writing needs first? Consequently, the key element in such situation is 'Needs Analysis (NA)'. Then it is rational to start selecting suitable materials or making any other decisions regarding the course.

This chapter aims at setting the scene for the study by introducing the research problem and its context. A discussion of the background of the study follows in section 1.1. The background of the setting is explained in section 1.2. The statement of the problem is stated in section 1.3. This is followed by the aims and the

objectives of the study in section 1.4 and the research questions in section 1.5. The rationale of the study is set down in section 1.6, followed by the potential significance of the study in section 1.7. The conceptual framework is presented in section 1.8. The limitations are provided in section 1.9, followed by the definitions of key terms in section 1.10 and organization of the thesis in section 1.11. Finally, section 1.12 concludes the chapter.

## **1.1 Study Background**

Oman's future vision of economic and social development considers education as an essential element in addition to other major social and cultural roles that aim at establishing a progressive society with an awareness of its duties and rights. Building on this, the Sultanate has given attention to structuring an effective and distinguished higher education system through development of appropriate policies and mechanisms and the providing of required resources to attain the objectives (MoM, 2004). The structure of the system of higher education has been established with more than fifty institutions offering programs to approximately 40,000 students. The Sultanate is appropriately turning its attention to the quality of that system in the context of the challenges of our globalised world with its fast accelerating knowledge economy, based on information technologies.

### **1.1.1 English Language Teaching Policy in Oman**

In Oman, teaching and learning a foreign language could open many windows for learning about oneself and others and could increase the sense of belonging to a certain community and help self-reflecting on own perceptions of identity (Carter and Nunan, 2001; Richard and Rodgers, 2001). Learning English enable students to choose from a variety of options and directions (Le Ha, 2005).

Oman is a Muslim country and from the Islamic perspective, the learning of a foreign language is highly appreciated and motivated as Islam sees this as a great opening to gain knowledge and appreciation for other cultures. From the past to the present moment, Islamic scholars have been active in learning other languages which facilitated the dialogue with other nations and cultures so that deeper understanding is attained and a bridge of knowledge transformation is established (Al Hussaini, 2004).

The English language teaching context in Oman has developed significantly in recent years due to the wider demand for English users (or speakers) to fill the constant expansion by the government and the private sectors' jobs. Since their inception about three decades ago tertiary education (or post-school education) has grown into well-established and up-to-date institutions that compete to provide the best of English Language Teaching (ELT), benefiting from materials produced globally to suit the local market, as well as native and non-native English language teachers' workforce are hired from countries who use English as L1, native speakers (e.g., England; Scotland; US, Canada, Newland, Australia, South Africa) or none native speakers such as India, Sri Lanka, Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco beside Omani

teachers. Undoubtedly, these contributive factors have affected the Omani learner in taking in the ideas and attitudes brought by those teachers.

In Oman, the decision to use English as a foreign language was recognized at a political and legislative level by the government aiming for continuous national development and extensive communication with the outside world (Al-Issa, 2006,). Education policies depart from the fact that English is the first global language and the main mean of communication with the world. Hence, a wide range of actions have been taken by the policy makers to ensure achieving this aim by providing the resources needed to implement it. These 'resources' or 'tools' such as the well-designed textbooks and properly qualified teachers of English are fundamental to successful language learning.

### **1.1.2 Higher Educational System in Oman**

Looking deeper at the Omani context, it seems that in the post renaissance period, higher education system in Oman, like other neighboring gulf countries have witnessed a drastic expansion and progress in education. In 1970, there were only three schools but now there are 1053 schools (MOE, 2012), 7 universities, 13 government colleges and 16 private colleges in different specialization (MOHE, 2012).

The higher educational system in Oman consists mainly of public and private colleges and universities. In all these colleges and universities, teachers are from different nationalities, both native and non-native speakers. Teachers hold teaching

beliefs formed over the years as learners and teachers of the language. These teaching beliefs arise from personal experiences and teaching practices and habits.

Learners in these colleges and universities have more advantages in terms of their degree of proficiency in English. Being exposed heavily to course books of international standards and native English teachers, learners are more influenced by who and what they interact with, that is to say, what they see, read and write about can have implications on who they are and what they become. Moreover, the interaction that takes place between the learners and the non-native staff may have a major effect on learners' developing perceptions and beliefs.

### **1.1.3 Colleges of Higher Education in Oman**

Higher education colleges are primarily teaching institutions, offering programs up to and including the Bachelor's degree. Some offer a variety of programs, while others are specialist institutions, offering programs in one or two professional fields, such as teaching, nursing, engineering or business studies. Note that the term "college" is used in a generic sense and includes institutions of higher education which have names such as "Academy" or "Institute" and which match the description of higher education colleges. In addition to formal-awarded courses, the higher education colleges frequently provide courses in areas such as English Language, Business and IT. These may be stand-alone courses, or may contribute towards an educational degree offered by the institution. The emphasis on teaching in higher education colleges means that the quality of teaching and learning should be high. The chief executive officer of a higher education college should meet standards



required for a senior academic appointment, including substantial academic and administrative experience.

#### **1.1.4 Colleges of Technology (CT) in Oman**

The CTs are academic and technological institutions. Their main is to attain the application of the technological and the administrative knowledge in the technological and the administrative fields. They also aim at meeting the students' needs through social, academic, technological, and vocational development to build up a generation of highly competent technicians. CTs provide recognized and high quality technological programs to provide the economic sector and other sectors with technically and administratively qualified personnel. Moreover, these colleges provide technological and parallel education and training services by conducting scientific and applied research and studies and publishing them for the benefit of the CTs and the society (MoM, 2004).

The Ministry of Manpower has seven Regional CTs in Oman, located in Al Mussanna, Ibra, Ibri, Nizwa, Salalah, Shinas and Muscat.

#### **Higher College of Technology, Muscat**

The Higher College of Technology (HCT), before being renamed and upgraded as such in 2001, was known as Oman Technical Industrial College, established in 1984 at the initiative of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said to educate the citizens of Oman by implementing high quality programs in various fields. The regional colleges of technology were started in 1993 except the ones in Shinas and Ibri, which were started in 2005 and 2007 respectively. HCT is the only college under the

Ministry of Manpower that offers programs at the Bachelor's Degree level, while the other CTs offer programs only up to the Higher Diploma level. The college was intended to award the Omani youth with knowledge and skills to face the challenges of the new age. Apart from the English Language Center, the College has seven departments; Engineering, Information Technology, Applied Science, Business Studies, Fashion Design, Photography and Pharmacy. The other regional colleges each has three specializations: IT, Business and Engineering.

### **Al Musanna College of Technology**

Al Musanna CT was established in 1993 through the decision of Vocational Authority no.131/93 in order to change from a Vocational Training Institute to a technical college.

Al Musanna CT is one of the seven technological colleges affiliated to the Ministry of Manpower. At present, there are three academic departments in the college namely: Business Studies Department, Engineering Department and Information Technology Department.

### **Ibra College of Technology**

Ibra CT is one of the established technical colleges in the Sultanate of Oman that has been governed by the Ministry of Manpower since 2001. The college offers different specializations (Business, IT, Engineering). The college was established in 1993, after changing the Vocational Training Institute into Ibra Technical Industrial College. In 2001, the name of the college was changed to Ibra CT. Thus, it has intentional specifications and standards of a higher educational and training institution, which offers practical and field training to its students.

### **Nizwa College of Technology**

Nizwa CT was established in 1993 and was known until June 2001, as Nizwa Technical and Industrial College, provides technological education to Omani school graduates. The college meets the post-school technological training needs of the students. Admission to the college is open to all Omani graduates who have achieved the General Secondary School Certificate, with a minimum qualifying score set by the admission authority.

### **Salalah College of Technology**

Salalah CT is located in the southern part of Oman, 1000 km from the capital. It started as a vocational training centre in 1979 and then became a technical industrial college in 1993. It was renamed as Salalah College of Technology in 2001. The College offers Higher Diploma courses in three specializations such as Business, Engineering, and Information Technology, in addition to the English Foundation courses.

### **Shinas College of Technology,**

Shinas CT was founded in September 2005. The college is located in Shinas, 150 km from the capital, Muscat. It started with the English Language Centre (ELC), which qualifies students to pursue a Certificate in Engineering, Information Technology and Business. The ELC provides a level-based English language program for all students admitted to the College.

### **Ibri College of Technology**

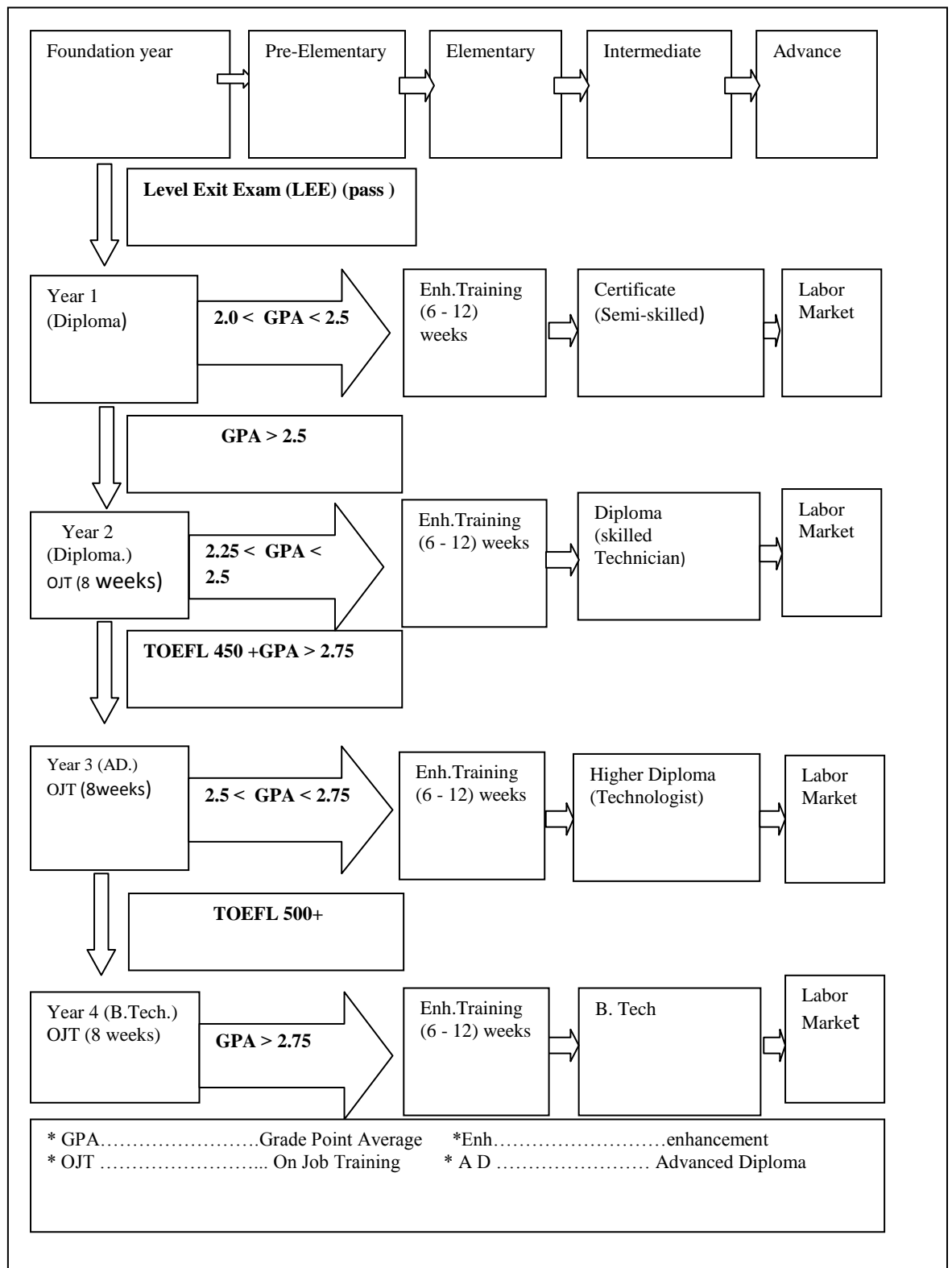
Ibri CT is the seventh college of technology administered and financed by the Ministry of Manpower in Oman. The college has an ambitious plan to serve the local community and to boost its economy. Admission to the college began in September 2007 and the total enrolment stands at 637 students, 33 % female; 67 % male. In the academic year 2011-2012 the college will be the home of no less than 3000 students. This expansion is accompanied with the provision of more facilities and more student services. Already, work has begun on phase two of the college's project which involves the construction of the Engineering Department.

#### **1.1.4.1 Foundation Program in Colleges of Technology (CT)**

The programs offered in the regional CTs is of the same academic standards approved and monitored by experienced educators in the Higher College of Technology (HCT) in Muscat to ensure that students' needs in the industry and globally are sustained.

The Foundation Program comprises of four levels: pre-elementary, elementary, intermediate and advanced level. Four semesters or less are spent depending on the student's level in the placement test as one of the entry requirements of the college. As the students progress they move from one level to another based on their performance. Upon completion of their foundation year, they can proceed to the post foundation level in their chosen specialization. Each level offers sufficient knowledge and skills for students in the different specialisations to enable them to compete in the labour market.

The four-level English Language Program in the Foundation Year mainly aims at developing students' linguistic proficiency to meet the academic requirements of the Post-Foundation specializations. Though it is a non-credit course, it is a prerequisite to joining the Post-Foundation technological programs. Throughout the four levels: pre-elementary, elementary, intermediate and advanced- newly registered students are placed in groups based on the results in the placement test, regardless of their prospective specialization. However, students who score exceptionally well on the placement test qualify to sit for the advanced level exit exam. Upon passing the Level Exit Exam (LEE) students go directly to the credit hour program. If they fail to pass the Advanced Level Exit Exam, students are enrolled in the advanced level. Figure 1.1 explains the study system in the CTs. It is adopted from the post foundation syllabus document.



**Figure 1.1:** Study System in Colleges of Technology

#### **1.1.4.2 Post-Foundation English Program in Colleges of Technology (CT)**

Post-Foundation English courses aim at enhancing students' English competence that they developed in the Foundation Program. They teach students the technical communication skills to enable them to communicate effectively and clearly using technical genres based on real life situations. Students are taught the strategies of Technical Writing (TW), and the essential reading strategies that accompany them. They are also taught the research skills for writing assignments and projects by acquainting them with critical thinking skills, the methods of literature review, data collection and analysis, and results reporting. Students are also taught the skills of presentation delivery using modern techniques and utilities such as computer and LCD.

In general, Post-Foundation English Courses ensure that the learners: develop English language skills that help them to communicate at a level that meets their needs, develop an increased awareness of the way the English language functions in a technical environment, gain increased confidence in using English to communicate, develop an understanding of what is required in formal study, develop an understanding of the skills and language that are needed to complete diploma level courses successfully at the college of technology, become aware of the technical genre, and be able to use the technical genre confidently. Table 1.1 explains the post foundation English program in the CTs. It is adopted from the post foundation syllabus document.

**Table 1.1: Post Foundation English Program**

<b>Course Code and Name</b>	ENGL 1100 Technical Writing I	ENGL1200 Technical Writing II	ENGL 2100 Technical Communication	ENGL 3100 Public Speaking
<b>Type of requirement</b>	Mandatory requirements for all qualifications offered (certificate level)	Mandatory requirements for all qualifications offered (certificate level)	A requirement for Engineering, IT and Science streams at diploma level (Diploma Level)	Mandatory requirement for the higher Diploma level for all specializations (Higher Diploma level)
<b>Time</b>	Year 1	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
<b>Number of credits</b>	3	3	3	3
<b>contact hours per week</b>	4 hours per week (2 theoretical + 2 practical)	4 hours per week (2 theoretical + 2 practical)	4 hours per week (2 theoretical + 2 practical)	4 hours per week (2 theoretical + 2 practical)
<b>Pre-requirements</b>	Proficiency at Advanced Level	ENG 1100 TW I	ENGL 1200 TW II	ENGL 2108 Business or ENGLE Technical Communication

#### 1.1.4.3 Students in Colleges of Technology (CT)

The CTs accept secondary school graduates (aged between 17 and 18 years). CTs in Oman receive two batches every year, the September intake & the January intake. The number of students who join the CTs has increased every year, as shown in Table 1.2.



**Table 1.2:** Number of Students who Joined CTs between 2007 - 2011

Academic year	No of Students
2007-2008	6000
2008-2009	7500
2009-2010	8900
2010-2011	16000

Students join the CTs after completing ten years in basic education and two years in post basic education. The Basic Education System consists of two phases: basic education in two cycles i.e. from 5-10 years and from 11-15 years, and post-basic education, which extends over two years. It aims to teach communication and learning skills, critical thinking, science and modern technology.

Regarding English teaching; English is taught as a foreign language, which is hardly used in everyday life. Arabic is the official language in the Government Offices and Omanis use their native language (Arabic) amongst themselves. Only expatriates who do not speak Arabic use English. Even some non-Arabic speaking expatriates try to learn Arabic in order to communicate with Omanis. Doctors at hospitals, for example, try to speak in Arabic with their Omani patients, because the latter do not speak English. This environmental factor makes the students assume that English is not an important issue in their educational life.

Concerning the English proficiency of secondary school graduates; some students graduate with a very low competence in English, for one reason or another. Therefore, all the postsecondary educational institutes in which English is the medium of instruction such as Sultan Qaboos University, Institutes of Nursing, and CTs place their newcomers in the English language teaching programs before they start the academic course. For those secondary graduates who join the CTs, a special

preliminary English course named the Foundation Year Program (FYP) is set in order to teach them the required English.

#### **1.1.4.4 Teaching Materials in Colleges Technology (CT)**

By materials, I mean everything that is used to help the teachers to teach English. This may include textbooks, CDs, handouts, etc. However, textbooks are the main teaching tool. There are textbooks for writing classes, reading classes, listening classes and general English classes. Every student is provided with a copy of these textbooks. The Heads of English Departments in the seven colleges decide during their periodic meetings, on the textbooks to be used. Most often there is one textbook for each language class. The teachers have to use the prescribed textbooks. There are some problems associated with such textbooks. Firstly, all of them are written in Europe and contain some topics which are considered culturally unsuitable for the Omani context. Therefore, teachers have to exclude those unwanted topics. Some tasks, in addition, are very boring or they are above or below the students' actual proficiency levels. The other teaching materials such as audio-cassettes and video-cassettes are also bought from the publishers. The colleges have a good selection of self-study materials such as audio/video cassettes, CDs, reading cards, readers, magazines and books, which are located in the Self-Access Centers (SAC).

#### **1.1.4.5 Teachers in Colleges of Technology (CT)**

The language teachers in the CTs come from different backgrounds. There are Omani and international teachers, Arabic speakers and non-Arabic speakers, English natives and non-natives, females and males. Some of these teachers are BA holders, some MA holders and few have PhDs.

#### **1.1.4.6 Colleges of Technology Graduates**

More than half a million employment prospects in the private sector will be available for the Omani technical manpower as the figure represents the volume of expatriate manpower operating in the field of engineering, notably as engineers and assistant engineers (MoM, 2011). It is shown in the Annual Statistics Booklets 2010; issue No 38 that this group of labor operates in technical maintenance that requires a diploma or a Bachelor's degree, both of which are awarded at CTs in Oman. CTs' graduates should be qualified and prepared to shoulder the occupational accountability and cope with the work challenges.

### **1.2 Background of Setting**

TW is one of the compulsory courses that students should undertake in the diploma level in the CTs in Oman. This course is aimed at enhancing students writing abilities. It aims at enabling the students in the seven specialisations, (Engineering, Business Studies, Information Technology (IT), Applied Sciences, Fashion Design, Pharmacy and Photography) to cope with their specialisation writing' requirements and then with the potential jobs' writing requirements.

### **1.2.1 Importance of Technical Writing for Students**

TW is a significant factor in the work environment for several reasons; Firstly, through TW, employees can maintain good custom-client relation, make sure that the work has been accomplished on time (directive memos), provide documentation that the job has been completed (status report), generate income (sales letter), keeps machinery working (maintenance instructions), ensure that the correct equipment is purchased (technical description and specification), give bosses the information they need (summaries), and find a job (resumes). Writing technique is crucial for companies' employees. Many companies hire teachers to help their employees improve their writing techniques to save time and money.

Employees in the different fields are required to do different types of TW. If they do not have the needed skills and knowledge, they will spend a lot of time in writing and in editing what they have written. Furthermore, TW reflects the writer's interpersonal communication skills. When someone writes a letter, a summary, or a report, besides conveying technical information, he/she is reflecting something about himself/herself to his/her readers (Laplant, 2011). The Colleges of Technology students should be well prepared to operate effectively in the labour market. The TW course is taught for students in the diploma level of the Post Foundation Programme as shown in table 1.1 to help them to cope with their specialisations' writing requirements.

In the foundation program, students take a general writing course before starting their specialisation study. They take the course in the four levels of the foundation program. They use a course book called " get ready to write". The writing course in

the four levels in the foundation program is explained in table 1.3. It is adapted from the foundation program document in the CTs.

**Table 1.3: Writing Courses in Foundation Program**

Level	Aims	course book	Duration
<b>1 (pre- elementary)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use capital letters for names, places, titles, organizations</li> <li>• Write short paragraphs about people, places and things</li> <li>• Organize paragraphs using time order, listing order, space order</li> </ul>	Get Ready to Write	4 months (4 classes a week)
<b>2 (Elementary)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand and use topic sentences, supporting sentences, and concluding sentences in their writing</li> <li>• Use conjunctions <i>and, but, or &amp; so to connect sentences</i></li> <li>• Write paragraphs describing a process</li> </ul>	Get Ready to Write	4 months (4 classes a week)
<b>3 (Intermediate)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write about people, Develop writing skills and Describe someone's character</li> <li>• Write effective introductions with clear thesis statements.</li> <li>• Give examples, details and facts to support the main ideas</li> </ul>	Ready to Write	4 months (4 classes a week)
<b>4 (Advanced)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing a structured essays (descriptive, narrative, compare and contrast)</li> </ul>	Ready to Write More	4 months (4 classes a week)

### 1.2.2 Importance of Investigating Students' Writing Needs

Two central needs should be taken into consideration in doing needs analysis for the purpose of course investigation: target needs and learning needs. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) claim that the term target needs relates to what learners need to do in the target situation, while the term learning needs relates to what learners need to do in order to learn. Also, there is a distinction between the terms and objectives in which both of them explain what learners can do in language learning context and

the actual needs analysis may become a significant tool in setting up such objectives (Nunan and Lamb, 1996).

There are different methods to conduct needs analysis for the purpose of course investigation. Questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis are the tools of needs analysis in this study. These instruments should present three major features: reliability, validity and usability (Bachman & Palmer, 1996) As a personal point of view, whether learners' needs are objective or subjective, target and learning needs analysis is a fundamental aspect of language learning context as it affects planning decisions, the specification of objectives and consequently the syllabus design.

### **1.3 Statement of Problem**

Technical Writing (TW) is taught as a separate course in the colleges of technology in Oman. It is directed at the diploma level, post-foundation students in the seven different specialisations in the Colleges of Technology (CTs) in Oman (Engineering, Business, IT, Applied Science, Fashion Design, Pharmacy, Photography). It is aimed at enhancing students' writing skill and enabling them to cope with their specialisations' writing needs and then with the labour market writing' needs. The TW course is a must for students of all specialisations in the diploma level in the CTs in Oman. They can take it in any semester of the six diploma level semesters. The implementation of this course started in 2011, but unfortunately it was not based on students' needs. This is referred to by Al-Husaini (2004) in his study when he mentioned that the implementation of the post foundation courses in the colleges of technology in Oman was not based on Needs Analysis (NA) study.

According to the post-foundation English syllabuses' document, the TW course' ultimate goal is to enable the learners to communicate effectively and clearly in the written mode of the language (MoM, 2000); however, there is much evidence that the objectives of the TW course are rarely attained and students often face difficulties in coping with their specialisations writing requirements, as well as the graduates of the CTs who face the same difficulty in handling their work place writing needs. This problem is referred to by Al Harrasi (2009) in his study about using genre-based approach in teaching in the CTs in Oman when he said that the CTs students face difficulties in coping with their specialisations writing requirements. Also, Al Maskari (2010) found in her study regarding students' motivation to study the English post foundation courses in Al Musan'a CT in Oman that students' motivation to learn some of these courses including the TW course is very low. The study also revealed that among the nine investigated courses, students are motivated to learn the public speaking course the most and the business ethics and the TW the least. Moreover, Al Husaini (2004) mentioned that students in the CTs in Oman find it difficult to produce a good piece of writing work.

Lecturers in the technical department in the CTs are always complaining of their students' low abilities in terms of writing and the difficulties they face in carrying out the required writing tasks in their specializations. Employers also have the same concern about the CTs graduates. They lack of writing skills which are needed in the workplace. These initial evidences regarding the TW course proficiency degree were gained from many sources: the feedback sent to the head of English Language Centre (ELC) in Ibri College of Technology from the head of the technical department regarding the efficiency of the TW course (see appendix 1), the on job training (OJT)

questionnaires filled by OJT industrial supervisors (see appendix 2), and the on job training (OJT) questionnaires filled by the college assessors for OJT (see appendix 3). Finally, the post foundation academic coordinators NA report in the CTs in Oman (see appendix 4).

Oman is looking at internalization therefore competent English users is crucial. In Oman, no one has looked at the writing needs of CTs students except Al-Husaini (2004) who studied the CTs students' needs in the foundation program and Al Maskari (2010) who concentrated on the students' motivation in studying the post foundation English courses in the CTs. What has been mentioned in the three previous paragraphs has provided insight that there is a need to investigate the TW course in the CTs in Oman to find out the extent to which the proposed goals of the TW course are achieved, and if not, what changes should be done

This study undertakes a language Needs Analysis (NA). Its ultimate objective is to examine the needs of students in the CTs in Oman in terms of writing in order to provide the data which might help to make the TW course more capable of producing students with efficient and appropriate TW skills. Brindley (1989) indicated that needs analysis (NA) is an important requirement in designing syllabus and in specifying language learning objectives. Also, Langroudi (1999) believes that the English for Specific Purpose (ESP) courses are mainly based on the analysis of students actual needs in the target situation. There are two kinds of needs; learning needs and target needs. Learning needs are more connected to the learning process such as attitudes, motivation, strategies, learning style, awareness, and personality. Target needs are what the learners should know in order to function effectively in the



target situation (Kormos et al; 2002). This study involves both needs; learning needs and target needs. In order to close the gap between the current practice in TW course teaching/learning and best practice, students' writing needs should be identified in order to make the TW course teaching/learning in the CTs more effective.

Many studies have been done on learners' needs in a similar context. For example, Al Hussaini (2004) who conducted a PhD research to analyze the foundation program in CTs in Oman, University of Leeds, UK in order to design the foundation year program in the CTs in Oman. Also, Qotbah (1990), did a PhD research on the language needs of the English Language Teaching Unit in Qatar University. Similar issues were dealt with by Killiny (1994) in the College of Health in Bahrain and Al-Attili (1986) in Kuwait Business Institute. This study draws on the previously mentioned studies, especially Al Hussaini (2004), particularly in terms of methodology. But, it is the first study to deal with the students' needs in terms of TW in Oman. Its main focus is the TW course in the CTs in Oman. Particularly, the current study identifies the actual writing needs of the students in the CTs in Oman in order to suggest improvement to the TW course implementation. Moreover, this study could be a base for those researchers who want to investigate the technical courses in the CTs in Oman.

## **1.4 Research Objectives**

The specific objectives of this study are:

- I. To identify the students' writing needs in the Colleges of Technology (CTs) in Oman.

- II. To analyse the Technical Writing (TW) course in the CTs in Oman based on the TW theory and the students writing needs.
- III. To investigate the deficiencies in the teaching/learning practice of the TW course in the CTs in Oman.

## **1.5 Research Questions**

In order to achieve the objective of the study; the following questions need to be answered:

- i. What are the actual writing needs of Omani students in the CTs?
- ii. Do the TW course content, delivery, and assessment in the CTs meet the TW theory?
- iii. Do the TW course content, delivery, and assessment in the CTs meet the students writing needs?
- IV. What are the deficiencies in the current TW course teaching/learning practice in the CTs in Oman?

## **1.6 Rationale of the Study**

The educational research is considered to have two related determinations to which this study would contribute: adding to the fundamental understanding of education-related phenomena and events, and informing practical decision-making. Effective educational research needs a balanced thought of the validity of knowledge claims, the credibility of researchers, and the usefulness and relevance of the work to situations of educational practice. Replication, such as that to be conducted in this study, plays an important role in accomplishing these goals and broadening the groundwork for further research (Wedell, 2009).